

## Crafting Messages for Electronic Media



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- 1 Identify the major electronic media used for brief business messages and describe the nine compositional modes needed for electronic media.
- 2 Describe the use of social networks in business communication.
- 3 Explain how companies and business professionals can use information and media sharing websites.
- 4 Describe the evolving role of email in business communication and explain how to adapt the three-step writing process to email messages.
- 5 Describe the business benefits of instant messaging (IM) and identify guidelines for effective IM in the workplace.
- 6 Describe the use of blogging and microblogging in business communication and briefly explain how to adapt the three-step process to blogging.
- 7 Explain how to adapt the three-step writing process for podcasts.

Mandy Farmer is president of the six-hotel Accent Inns chain based in Vancouver. She knows that monitoring her hotels' online reputation makes smart business. "In the online world, everyone is writing reviews, whether it is in Google Maps, TripAdvisor.com, or Booking.com," says Farmer. Her organization uses social media to listen to customers and improve service.<sup>1</sup>

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

"Customer reviews in the hotel industry are king."

—Mandy Farmer,  
President, Accent Inns

## Using Electronic Media for Business Communication

The use of social media represents a fundamental shift in business communication. The shift is still taking place, as more consumers adopt social media and businesses experiment with the best ways to integrate these media and to adapt their internal and external communication practices.

**Social media** such as Facebook are electronic media that empower stakeholders as participants in the communication process by allowing them to share content, revise content, respond to content, or contribute new content. Quite a bit of attention gets paid to specific tools and technologies in social and other electronic media, but the most important changes go a lot deeper than the tools themselves. As "The Social Communication Model" in Chapter 1 explains, these technologies have changed the relationships

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1

Identify the major electronic media used for brief business messages and describe the nine compositional modes needed for electronic media.

The range of options for short business messages continues to grow with innovations in electronic and social media.

Technological advances have changed reader behaviour, forcing changes in the practice of business communication.

between companies and their stakeholders, influenced the way companies are managed, and altered the behaviours and expectations of consumers and employees.

For instance, many people now rely heavily on content sharing through social media tools to get information of personal and professional interest. Additionally, many consumers and professionals frequently engage in “content snacking,” consuming large numbers of small pieces of information and bypassing larger documents that might require more than a few minutes or even a few seconds to read.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the amount of content accessed from mobile devices (with the challenges they present in terms of screen size and input mechanisms) continues to rise.<sup>3</sup> Faced with such behaviour, communicators need to be more careful than ever to create audience-focused messages and to consider restructuring messages using more teasers, orientations, and summaries.

With all these changes taking place, the field of business communication is a lot more interesting—but also a lot more complicated—than it was just a few years ago. For example, newer and smaller firms have a better opportunity to compete against big companies with big media budgets, because the quality of the message and the credibility of the sender are supremely important in this new environment. Empowered stakeholders can use the amplifying power of social media to help companies that appear to be acting in their best interests and harm companies that are not. Social media also have the potential to increase transparency, with more eyes and ears to monitor business activities and to use the crowd’s voice to demand accountability and change.

Although social media have reduced the amount of control that businesses have over the content and the process of communication,<sup>4</sup> today’s smart companies are learning how to adapt their communication efforts to this new media landscape and to welcome customers’ participation. Social media are also revolutionizing internal communication, breaking down traditional barriers in the organizational hierarchy, promoting the flow of information and ideas, and enabling networks of individuals and organizations to collaborate on a global scale.<sup>5</sup>

## Media Choices for Brief Messages

Social media are not the only options available for business communication, of course. Individuals and companies have a broad range of options for sending brief messages (from one or two sentences up to several pages long), including the following:

- Social networks
- Information and media sharing sites
- Email
- Instant messaging (IM)
- Text messaging
- Blogging and microblogging
- Podcasting

This chapter covers all of these media, and Chapters 10 and 11 explore two other key electronic media, websites and wikis, which are used for longer messages and documents.

As this list suggests, businesses use many of the same tools you use for personal communication. Generally speaking, companies are quick to jump on any communication platform where consumers are likely to congregate or that promise more efficient internal or external communication (see Figure 6.1).

Businesses continue to experiment with new media; for example, see Figure 6.2. The IBM Business Center in the virtual world Second Life offers customer information along with real-time interaction with IBM product experts.



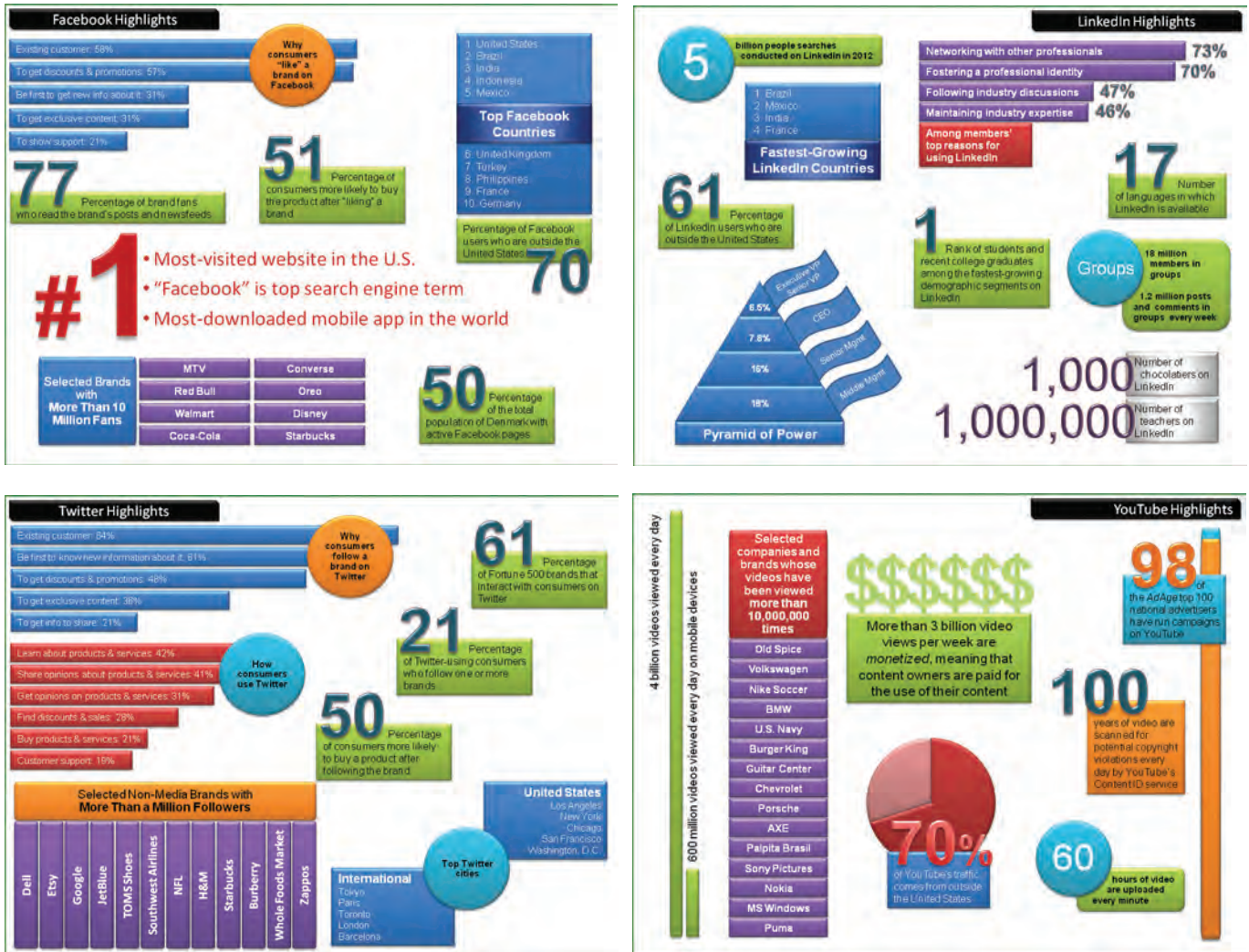
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FIGURE 6.1 An Infographic on the Rise and Reach of Social Media



Source: Adapted from 2012 CEO, *Social Media & Leadership Survey*, Brandfog, www.brandfog.com; "About Us," LinkedIn, accessed 28 May 2012, <http://press.linkedin.com/about/>; "The Global LinkedIn Audience," LinkedIn, accessed 28 May 2012, <http://marketing.linkedin.com>; Fan Page List, accessed 28 May 2012, <http://fanpagelist.com>; Josh Mendelohn, "The Business Impact of Twitter: It's Come a Long Way," Constant Contact, 20 October 2011, <http://blogs.constantcontact.com>; "10 Facts about Consumer Behavior on Twitter," Social Media Quickstarter, accessed 28 May 2012, www.socialquickstarter.com; "10 Facts about Consumer Behavior on Facebook," Social Media Quickstarter, accessed 28 May 2012, www.socialquickstarter.com; Samantha Murphy, "These Are the Most Engaging Brands on Facebook," Mashable, 15 May 2012, <http://mashable.com>; "Statistics," YouTube, accessed 28 May 2012, www.youtube.com.

Although most of your business communication is likely to be via electronic means, don't automatically dismiss the benefits of printed messages. Here are several situations in which you should use a printed message over electronic alternatives:

- When you want to make a formal impression
- When you are legally required to provide information in printed form
- When you want to stand out from the flood of electronic messages
- When you need a permanent, unchangeable, or secure record

Obviously, if you can't reach a particular audience electronically, you'll also need to use a printed message. Appendix A offers guidelines on formatting printed memos and letters.

FIGURE 6.2 Communication Innovations: Virtual Worlds



## Compositional Modes for Electronic Media

As you practise using electronic media in this course, focus on the principles of social media communication and the fundamentals of planning, writing, and completing messages, rather than on the specific details of any one medium or system.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, the basic communication skills required usually transfer from one system to another. You can succeed with written communication in virtually all electronic media by using one of nine *compositional modes*:

Communicating successfully with electronic media requires a wide range of writing approaches.

- **Conversations.** IM is a great example of a written medium that mimics spoken conversation. And just as you wouldn't read a report to someone sitting in your office, don't use conversational modes to exchange large volumes of information.
- **Comments and critiques.** As Mandy Farmer knows, one of the most powerful aspects of social media is the opportunity for interested parties to express opinions and provide feedback, whether it's leaving comments on a blog post or reviewing products on an e-commerce site. Sharing helpful tips and insightful commentary is also a great way to build your personal brand. To be an effective commenter, focus on short chunks of information that a broad spectrum of other site visitors will find helpful. Avoid rants, insults, jokes, and blatant self-promotion.
- **Orientations.** The ability to help people find their way through an unfamiliar system or subject is a valuable writing skill, and a talent that readers greatly appreciate. Unlike summaries (see next list item), orientations don't give away the key points in the collection of information but rather tell readers where to find those points. To write effective orientations step back and view it from the inexperienced perspective of a "newbie."
- **Summaries.** Summaries can serve several purposes. At the beginning of an article or webpage, a summary functions as a miniature version of the document, giving readers all the key points while skipping over details. In some instances, this is all a reader needs. In other instances, the up-front summary helps a reader decide whether to invest the time needed to read the full document. At the end of an article or webpage, a summary functions as a review, reminding readers of the key points they've just read.
- **Reference materials.** One of the greatest benefits of the internet is the access it can provide to vast quantities of reference materials—numerical or textual information

that people typically don't read in a linear way but rather search through to find particular data points, trends, or other details. One of the challenges of writing reference material is that you can't always know how readers will want to access it. Making the information accessible via search engines is an important step. However, readers don't always know which search terms will yield the best results, so consider an orientation and organize the material in logical ways with clear headings that promote skimming.

- **Narratives.** The storytelling techniques covered in Chapter 3 (see page 61) can be effective in a wide variety of situations, from company histories to product reviews and demonstrations. Narratives work best when the beginning piques readers' curiosity, the middle moves quickly through the challenges faced, and the ending is inspiring or instructive and gives readers information they can use in their own lives.
- **Teasers.** Teasers intentionally withhold key pieces of information as a way to pull readers or listeners into a story or other document. Teasers are widely used in marketing and sales messages, such as a bit of copy on the outside of an envelope that promises important information on the inside. In electronic media, the space limitations and URL linking capabilities of Twitter and other microblogging systems make them a natural tool for the teaser approach. Figure 6.3 shows how the global accounting and management firm Deloitte uses Twitter to announce and promote resources. The tweet is a teaser inviting the reader to click through for more information. Although they can certainly be effective, teasers need to be used sparingly and with respect for readers' time and intelligence. Be sure that the *pay-off*, the information a teaser links to, is valuable and legitimate to avoid losing credibility if readers think they are being tricked.
- **Status updates and announcements.** If you use social media frequently, much of your writing will involve status updates and announcements. However, post only those updates that readers will find useful, and include only the information they need.

With Twitter and other super-short messaging systems, the ability to write a compelling *teaser* is an important skill.

FIGURE 6.3 Compositional Modes: Using Twitter for Teasers

The screenshot shows the Deloitte Twitter profile page. The profile header includes the name 'Deloitte', a bio 'Sharing news, research, blogs, podcasts, and more from Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited and its member firms.', and statistics: 2,590 FOLLOWS, 1,198 FOLLOWING, and 38,118 FOLLOWERS. The main content is a list of tweets. Blue arrows on the right side of the image point to specific links in the tweets:

- ← Links to an article in a respected business magazine (points to 'Electricity-market reform: Volt from the blue | The Economist econ.st/Ly23Ei w/ Daniel Grosvenor #energybill')
- ← Links to a seminar invitation on Deloitte's website (points to 'How will latest #tax laws impact the #MiddleEast? Learn more at 6th ME Tax Conference on 30 May: bit.ly/MKO4dW')
- ← Links to an article and information about the firm's consulting services in this market (points to 'Sharp price savings in commodities from coffee to crude oil are creating a significant business challenges: bit.ly/UM25UX')
- ← Links to a video on YouTube (points to 'The Deloitte Prague Cup. The Deloitte spirit. 60 Deloitte teams from 25 countries. 690 players and supporters: bit.ly/LQwdp6')
- ← Links to a video on Deloitte's website (points to 'Missed our Consumer Business Predictions & Priorities seminar? Download presentations: bit.ly/LxboZc')
- ← Links to an article and information about the firm's consulting services in this market (points to 'Effective commodity management could help you profit from price volatility. Learn how: bit.ly/LORVkg')
- ← Links to a report on Deloitte's website (points to 'Where are you headed this summer? Deloitte report shares Canadian travel trends: bit.ly/UJOT31 #Tourism')
- ← Links to a conference invitation on Deloitte's website (points to 'Interested in #pharma & #biotech? Join Deloitte & #FinancialTimes at #FTush12 conf. 6 June NYC: bit.ly/Js8ppV #FTLiveTweets')

Source: Deloitte Global Services Twitter page. Copyright © 2012 Deloitte Global Services Limited. Reprinted with permission.

- **Tutorials.** Given the community nature of social media, the purpose of many messages is to share how-to advice. Becoming known as a reliable expert is a great way to build customer loyalty for your company while enhancing your own personal value.

Of course, many of these modes are also used in print media, but over time you may find yourself using all of them in various electronic and social media contexts. As you approach a new communication task using electronic media, ask yourself what kind of information audience members are likely to need and then choose the appropriate compositional mode.

## Creating Content for Social Media

Writing for social media requires a different approach than writing for traditional media.

No matter what media or compositional mode you are using for a particular message, writing for social media requires a different approach than traditional media. Whether you're writing a blog or posting a product demonstration video to YouTube, consider these tips for creating successful content for social media:<sup>7</sup>

- **Remember that it's a conversation, not a lecture or a sales pitch.** One of the great appeals of social media is the feeling of conversation, of people talking *with* one another instead of one person talking *at* everyone else. For all their technological sophistication, in an important sense social media are really just a new spin on the age-old practice of *word-of-mouth* communication. As more and more people gain a voice in the marketplace, companies that try to maintain the old “we talk, you listen” mindset are likely to be ignored in the social media landscape.
- **Write informally but not carelessly.** Write as a human being with a unique, personal voice. However, don't take this as a license to get sloppy; no one wants to slog through misspelled words and half-baked sentences to find your message.
- **Create concise, specific, and informative headlines.** Given the importance of headlines in the face of content snacking and information overload, headlines are extremely important in social media. Avoid the temptation to engage in clever wordplay when writing headlines and teasers. This advice applies to all forms of business communication, of course, but it is essential for social media. Readers don't want to spend time and energy figuring out what your witty headlines mean. Search engines won't know what they mean, either, so fewer people will find your content.
- **Get involved and stay involved.** Social media make some businesspeople nervous because they don't permit a high level of control over messages. However, don't hide from criticism. Take the opportunity to correct misinformation or explain how mistakes will be fixed.
- **If you need to promote something, do so indirectly.** Just as you wouldn't hit people with a company sales pitch during an informal social gathering, refrain from blatant promotional efforts in social media.
- **Be transparent and honest.** Honesty is always essential, of course, but the social media environment is unforgiving. Attempts to twist the truth, withhold information, or hide behind a virtual barricade only invite attack in the “public square” of social media. Richard Brewer-Hay, who writes the eBay Ink blog (<http://ebayinkblog.com>) for the online auction site, explains that “by demonstrating a willingness to talk openly and transparently about eBay operations and business decisions, the blog is just one way we've ensured trust and confidence in our company.”<sup>8</sup>
- **Surrender the illusion of control.** Fear of losing control over their messages and brand images makes some managers leery of adopting or allowing social media in their companies. However, that fear is mostly irrelevant, because whatever control they might have had in the past is more or less gone in this wild new world. The only option is to work with social media, encouraging and shaping conversations, rather than trying to control them.

- **Think before you post!** Because of careless messages, individuals and companies have been sued because of Twitter updates, employees have been fired for Facebook wall postings, vital company secrets have been leaked, and business and personal relationships have been strained. Remember that you share the responsibility of keeping your company's and your customers' data private and secure. Assume that every message you send in any electronic medium will be stored forever and might be read by people far beyond your original audience. Ask yourself two questions: First, "Would I say this to my audience face to face?" And second, "Am I comfortable with this message becoming a permanent part of my personal and professional communication history?"

A momentary lapse of concentration while using social media can cause tremendous career or company damage.

## Social Networks

**Social networks**, online services that enable individual and organizational members to form connections and share information, have become a major force in business communication in recent years. In addition to Facebook, a variety of public and private social networks are used by businesses and professionals. They can be grouped into three categories:

- **Public, general-purpose networks.** Facebook is the largest such network, although Google+ is gaining membership rapidly and is attracting many companies and brands. Additionally, regionally focused networks have significant user bases in some countries, such as China's Renren and Kaixin001.<sup>9</sup>
- **Public, specialized networks.** Whereas Facebook and Google+ serve a wide variety of personal and professional needs, other networks focus on a particular function or a particular audience. The most widely known of these is LinkedIn, with its emphasis on career- and sales-related networking. Other networks address the needs of entrepreneurs, small business owners, specific professions, product enthusiasts, and other narrower audiences.
- **Private networks.** Some companies have built private social networks for internal use.

Regardless of the purpose and audience, social networks are most beneficial when all participants give and receive information, advice, support, and introductions—just as in offline social interaction. The following two sections describe how social networks are used in business communication and offer advice on using these platforms successfully.

## Business Communication Uses of Social Networks

With their ability to reach virtually unlimited numbers of people through a variety of electronic formats, social networks are a great fit for many business communication needs. Here are some of the key applications of social networks for internal and external business communication:

- **Integrating company workforces.** Just as public networks can bring friends and family together, internal social networks can help companies grow closer, including helping new employees navigate their way through the organization, finding experts, mentors, and other important contacts; encouraging workforces to "jell" after reorganizations or mergers; and overcoming structural barriers in communication channels, bypassing the formal communication system to deliver information where it is needed in a timely fashion.
- **Fostering collaboration.** Networks can play a major role in collaboration in various ways: by identifying the best people, both inside the company and in other companies, to collaborate on projects; finding pockets of knowledge and expertise within the organization; giving meeting or seminar participants a way to meet before an event and to maintain relationships after an event; accelerating the development of teams by

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

Describe the use of social networks in business communication.

helping members get to know one another and to identify individual areas of expertise; and sharing information throughout the organization. The information technology company EMC estimates that its internal social network has cut costs by more than \$40 million by helping employees use company resources more effectively and reducing the need to hire outside contractors.<sup>10</sup>

- **Building communities.** Social networks are a natural tool for bringing together *communities of practice*, people who engage in similar work, and *communities of interest*, people who share enthusiasm for a particular product or activity. Large and geographically dispersed companies can benefit greatly from communities of practice that connect experts who may work in different divisions or different countries. Communities of interest that form around a specific product are sometimes called **brand communities**, and nurturing these communities can be a vital business communication task. A majority of consumers now trust their peers more than any other source of product information, so formal and informal brand communities are becoming an essential information source in consumer buying decisions.<sup>11</sup> Increasingly, these community building efforts include some aspect of *gamification*, which is the addition of game-playing aspects, such as Foursquare’s “check-in” competitions.<sup>12</sup> Foursquare is also an example of *location-based social networking*, which links the virtual world of online social networking with the physical world of retail stores and other locations. As mobile web use in general continues to grow, location-based networking promises to become an important business communication medium because mobile consumers are a significant economic force—through the purchases they make directly and through their ability to influence other consumers.<sup>13</sup>
- **Socializing brands and companies.** According to one recent survey of company executives, *socialization* now accounts for more than half of a company’s or brand’s global reputation.<sup>14</sup> **Brand socialization** is a measure of how effectively a company engages with its various online stakeholders in a mutually beneficial exchange of information. Social networks and related tools such as Twitter are the primary means of socializing companies and brands. To be successful, the communication on these platforms must be of value to all parties, not just the company. For example, comparing posts from General Motors, Toyota, and Ford suggests that brand socialization plays a significant role in the widely varying degrees of engagement these three companies have on Facebook. Many of Ford’s posts focus on its history (including classic Ford cars and the company’s efforts to supply the military in past wars) and its involvement in auto racing, topics of likely interest to car enthusiasts. Toyota’s posts tend to feature current community-related news and events, such as results from company-sponsored contests (including a video competition for college students). GM’s Facebook posts highlight community involvement as well, but tend to emphasize such company-focused items as monthly sales results, new products, and executive profiles. The fact that Toyota has three times as many Facebook fans as General Motors, and Ford has five times more than GM (as of mid-2012) is probably not a coincidence.<sup>15</sup>
- **Understanding target markets.** With hundreds of millions of people expressing themselves via social media, you can be sure that smart companies are listening. When asked about the value of having 33 million Facebook fans, Coca-Cola CEO Muhtar Kent replied, “The value is you can talk with them. They tell you things that are important for your business and brands.”<sup>16</sup> In addition, a number of tools now exist to gather market intelligence from social media more or less automatically. For example, *sentiment analysis* is an intriguing research technique in which companies track social networks and other media with automated language-analysis software that tries to take the pulse of public opinion and identify influential opinion makers.<sup>17</sup>
- **Recruiting employees and business partners.** Companies use social networks to find potential employees, short-term contractors, subject-matter experts, product and service suppliers, and business partners. A key advantage here is that these introductions are

Socializing a brand is becoming an increasingly important element of marketing and public relations strategies.

Social networks are vital tools for distributing information as well as gathering information about the business environment.



made via trusted connections in a professional network. On LinkedIn, for example, members can recommend each other based on current or past business relationships, which helps remove the uncertainty of initiating business relationships with complete strangers.

- **Connecting with sales prospects.** Salespeople on networks such as LinkedIn can use their network connections to identify potential buyers and then to ask for introductions through those shared connections. Sales networking can reduce *cold calling*, telephoning potential customers out of the blue—a practice that few people on either end of the conversation find pleasant.
- **Supporting customers.** Customer service is another one of the fundamental areas of business communication that have been revolutionized by social media. *Social customer service* involves using social networks and other social media tools to give customers a more convenient way to get help from the company and to help each other.
- **Extending the organization.** Social networking is also fueling the growth of *networked organizations*, sometimes known as *virtual organizations*, where companies supplement the talents of their employees with services from one or more external partners, such as a design lab, a manufacturing firm, or a sales and distribution company.



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## Strategies for Business Communication on Social Networks

Social networks offer lots of business communication potential, but with those opportunities comes a certain degree of complexity. Moreover, the norms and practices of business social networking continue to evolve. Follow these guidelines to make the most of social networks for both personal branding and company communication:<sup>18</sup>

- **Choose the best compositional mode for each message, purpose, and network.** As you visit various social networks, take some time to observe the variety of message types you see in different parts of each website. For example, the informal status update mode works well for Facebook posts but would be less effective for company overviews and mission statements.
- **Offer valuable content to members of your online communities.** People don't join social networks to be sales targets, of course. They join looking for connections and information. *Content marketing* is the practice of providing free information that is valuable to community members; it also helps a company build closer ties with current and potential customers.<sup>19</sup>
- **Join existing conversations.** Search for online conversations that are already taking place. Answer questions, solve problems, and respond to rumours and misinformation.
- **Anchor your online presence in your hub.** Although it's important to join those conversations and be visible where your stakeholders are active, it's equally important to anchor your presence at your own central *hub*—a web presence you own and control. This can be a combination of a conventional website, a blog, and a company-sponsored online community, for example.<sup>20</sup> Use the hub to connect the various pieces of your online “self” (as an individual or a company) to make it easier for people to find and follow you. For example, you can link to your blog from your LinkedIn profile or automatically post your blog entries into the Notes tab on your Facebook page.
- **Facilitate community building.** Make it easy for customers and other audiences to connect with the company and with each other. For example, you can use the group feature on Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social networks to create and foster special-interest groups within your networks. Groups are a great way to connect people who are interested in specific topics, such as owners of a particular product.

Product promotion can be done on social networks, but it needs to be done in a low-key, indirect way.

- **Restrict conventional promotional efforts to the right time and right place.** Persuasive communication efforts are still valid for specific communication tasks, such as regular advertising and the product information pages on a website, but efforts to inject blatant “salespeak” into social networking conversations will usually be rejected by the audience.
- **Maintain a consistent personality.** Each social network is a unique environment with particular norms of communication.<sup>21</sup> For example, as a strictly business-oriented network, LinkedIn has a more formal “vibe” than Facebook and Google+, which cater to both consumers and businesses. However, while adapting to the expectations of each network, be sure to maintain a consistent personality across all the networks in which you are active.<sup>22</sup> The computer giant HP, for instance, uses the same (fairly formal-sounding) company overview on LinkedIn and Facebook, while posting updates on Facebook that are “chattier” and more in keeping with the tone expected by Facebook visitors.<sup>23</sup>

See “Writing Promotional Messages for Social Media” in Chapter 9 (page 213) for more tips on writing messages for social networks and other social media.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3

Explain how companies and business professionals can use information and media sharing websites.

## Information and Media Sharing Sites

Social networks allow members to share information and media items as part of the networking experience, but a variety of systems have been designed specifically for sharing content. The field is diverse and still evolving, but the possibilities can be divided into user-generated content sites, media curation sites, and community Q&A sites.

### User-Generated Content Sites

YouTube and other user-generated content sites are now important business communication channels.

YouTube, Flickr, Yelp, and other **user-generated content (UGC) sites**, in which users rather than website owners contribute most or all of the content, have become serious business tools. On YouTube, for example, companies post everything from product demonstrations and TV commercials to company profiles and technical support explanations.

Moreover, the business communication value of sites such as YouTube goes beyond the mere ability to deliver content. The social aspects of these sites, including the ability to vote for, comment on, and share material, encourage enthusiasts to spread the word about the companies and products they endorse.<sup>24</sup>

Creating compelling and useful content is the key to leveraging the reach of social networks.

As with other social media, the keys to effective user-generated content are making it valuable and making it easy. First, provide content that people want to see and to share with colleagues. A video clip that explains how to use a product more effectively will be more popular than a clip that talks about how amazing the company behind the product is. Also, keep videos short, generally no longer than three to five minutes if possible.<sup>25</sup>

Second, make material easy to find, consume, and share. For example, a **branded channel** on YouTube lets a company organize all its videos in one place, making it easy for visitors to browse and subscribe and to share them using their accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms.

The “voice of the crowd,” enabled through social media sites, can dramatically influence the way businesses are managed.

As one example of the way these sites are changing business communication, Yelp ([www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)) has become a major influence on consumer behaviour at a local level by aggregating millions of reviews of stores, restaurants, and other businesses in large cities across the country.<sup>26</sup> With the voice of the crowd affecting consumer behaviour, businesses need to (a) focus on performing at a high level so that customers reward them with positive reviews, and (b) get involved on Yelp (the site encourages business owners to tell potential customers about themselves as well). These efforts could pay off much more handsomely than advertising and other conventional communication efforts.

## Media Curation Sites

Newsfeeds from blogs and other online publishers can be a great way to stay on top of developments in any field. However, anyone who has signed up for more than a few RSS feeds has probably experienced the “firehose effect” of getting so many feeds so quickly that it becomes impossible to stay on top of them. Moreover, when a highly active publisher feeds every new article, from the essential to the trivial, the reader is left to sort it all out every day.

An intriguing alternative to newsfeeds is **media curation**, in which someone with expertise or interest in a particular field collects and republishes material on a particular topic. The authors’ Business Communication Headline News (<http://bchn.businesscommunicationnetwork.com>), for instance, was one of the earliest examples of media curation in the field of business communication.

New curation tools, including Pinterest (<http://pinterest.com>) and Scoop.it ([www.scoop.it](http://www.scoop.it)), make it easy to assemble attractive online magazines or portfolios on specific topics. Although it raises important issues regarding content ownership and message control,<sup>27</sup> curation has the potential to bring the power of community and shared expertise to a lot of different fields; ultimately, it could reshape audience behaviour and therefore the practice of business communication.

Media curation is the process of collecting and presenting information on a particular topic in a way that makes it convenient for target readers.



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## Community Q&A Sites

**Community Q&A sites**, on which visitors answer questions posted by other visitors, are a contemporary twist on the early ethos of computer networking, which was people helping each other. (Groups of like-minded people connected online long before the World Wide Web was even created.) Community Q&A sites include dedicated customer support communities such as those hosted on Get Satisfaction (<http://getsatisfaction.com>), public sites such as Quora ([www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com)) and Yahoo! Answers (<http://answers.yahoo.com>), and member-only sites such as LinkedIn Answers ([www.linkedin.com/answers](http://www.linkedin.com/answers)).

Responding to questions on Q&A sites can be a great way to build your personal brand, to demonstrate your company’s commitment to customer service, and to counter misinformation about your company and its products. Keep in mind that when you respond to an individual query on a community Q&A site, you are also “responding in advance” to every person in the future who comes to the site with the same question. In other words, you are writing a type of reference material in addition to corresponding with the original questioner, so keep the longer timeframe and wider audience in mind.

Community Q&A sites offer great opportunities for building your personal brand.

## Email

Email has been a primary medium for many companies for years, and in the beginning it offered a huge advantage in speed and efficiency over the media it replaced (printed and faxed messages). Over time, email began to be used for many communication tasks, simply because it was the only widely available electronic medium for written messages and millions of users were comfortable with it. However, newer tools such as instant messaging, blogs, microblogs, social networks, and shared workspaces are taking over specialized tasks for which they are better suited.<sup>28</sup> For example, email is usually not the best choice for brief online conversations (IM is better for this) or project management updates (blogs, wikis, and various purpose-built systems are often better for this).

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 4

Describe the evolving role of email in business communication and explain how to adapt the three-step writing process to email messages.

In addition to the widespread availability of better alternatives for many communication purposes, the indiscriminate use of email has lowered its appeal in the eyes of many professionals. In a sense, email is too easy to use—it's too easy to send low-value messages to multiple recipients and to trigger long message chains that become impossible to follow as people chime in along the way. In fact, frustration with email is so high in some companies that managers are making changes to reduce or even eliminate its use for internal communication. The global public relations firm Weber Shandwick recently moved its 3000 employees from email to a custom system described as “equal parts Facebook, work group collaboration software, and employee bulletin board.”<sup>29</sup>

Email is still one of the more important business communication media.

However, email still has compelling advantages that will keep it in steady use in many companies. First, email is universal. Anybody with an email address can reach anybody else with an email address, no matter which systems the senders and receivers are on. Second, email is still the best medium for many private, short- to medium-length messages, particularly when the exchange is limited to two people. Unlike with microblogs or IM, for instance, midsize messages are easy to compose and easy to read on email. Third, email's noninstantaneous nature is an advantage when used properly. Email allows senders to compose substantial messages in private and on their own schedule, and it allows recipients to read those messages at their leisure.

## Planning Email Messages

Email gives people time to think through responses.

The solution to email overload starts in the planning step, by making sure every message has a useful, business-related purpose. Many companies now have formal **email policies** that specify how employees can use email, including restrictions against using company email service for personal messages and sending material that might be deemed objectionable. In addition, many employers now monitor email, either automatically with software programmed to look for sensitive content or manually via security staff actually reading selected email messages. Regardless of formal policies, though, every email user has a responsibility to avoid actions that could cause trouble, from downloading virus-infected software to sending objectionable photographs.

*Email hygiene* refers to all the efforts that companies are making to keep email clean and safe—from spam blocking and virus protection to content filtering.<sup>30</sup>

Even with fairly short messages, spend a moment or two on the message planning tasks described in Chapter 3: analyzing the situation, gathering necessary information for your readers, and organizing your message. You'll save time in the long run because you will craft a more effective message on the first attempt. Your readers will get the information they need and won't have to generate follow-up messages asking for clarification or additional information.

### REAL-TIME UPDATES



Learn More by Watching This Video

Find out why email starts fights—and how to avoid them

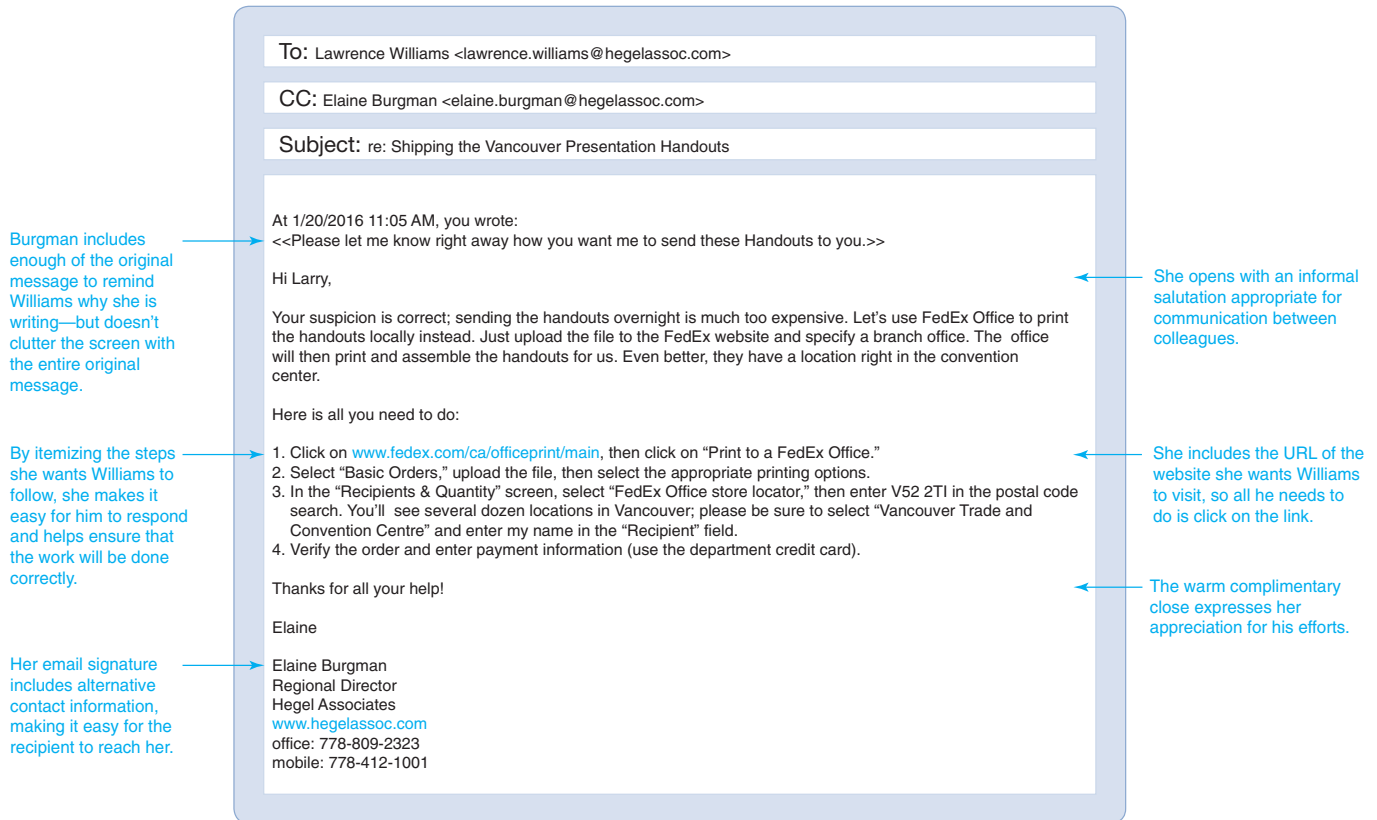
See why the lean medium of email can lead to misunderstanding when it's used in the wrong situations. See how businesses large and small are putting it to work. Go to <http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6> and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student StudyTools.

Business email messages are more formal than the email messages you send to family and friends.

## Writing Email Messages

When you approach email writing on the job, recognize that business email is a more formal medium than you are probably accustomed to with email for personal communication (see Figure 6.4). The expectations of writing quality for business email are higher than for personal email, and the consequences of bad writing or poor judgment can be much more serious. For example, email messages and other electronic documents have the same legal weight as printed documents, and they are often used as evidence in lawsuits and criminal investigations.<sup>31</sup>

FIGURE 6.4 Email for Business Communication



The **email subject line** is one of the most important parts of an email message because it helps recipients decide which messages to read and when to read them. To capture your audience's attention, make your subject lines informative and compelling. Go beyond simply describing or classifying your message; use the opportunity to build interest with keywords, quotations, directions, or questions.<sup>32</sup>

For example, "July sales results" accurately describes the content of the message, but "July sales results: good news and bad news" is more intriguing. Readers will want to know why some news is good and some is bad.

In addition, many email programs display the first few words or lines of incoming messages, even before the recipient opens them. In the words of social media public relations expert Steve Rubel, you can "tweetify" the opening lines of your email messages to make them stand out. In other words, choose the first few words carefully to grab your reader's attention.<sup>33</sup> Think of the first sentence as an extension of your subject line.

As a lean medium, email can present challenges when you need to express particular emotional nuances, whether positive or negative. For years, users of email (as well as IM and text messaging) have used a variety of *emoticons* to express emotions in casual communication. For example, to express sympathy as a way to take some of the sting out of negative news, one might use a "frowny face," either the character string : ( or a graphical emoticon such as ☹ or one of the colourful and sometimes animated characters available in some systems. Over the years, the use of emoticons was widely regarded as unprofessional and therefore advised against in business communication. Recently, though, an increasing number of professionals seem to be using them, particularly for communication with close colleagues, even as other professionals continue to view them as evidence of lazy or immature writing.<sup>34</sup> In the face of these conflicting perspectives, the best advice is to use caution. Avoid emoticons for all types of external communication and for formal internal communication, and avoid those bright yellow graphical emoticons (and particularly animated emoticons) in all business communication.

A poorly written subject line could lead to a message being deleted or ignored.

Attitudes about emoticons in business communication are changing; you'll have to use your best judgment in every case.

## Completing Email Messages

Particularly for important messages, taking a few moments to revise and proofread might save you hours of headaches and damage control. Also, favour simplicity when it comes to producing your email messages. A clean, easily readable font, in black on a white background, is sufficient for nearly all email messages. Take advantage of your email system's ability to include an **email signature**, a small file that automatically includes such items as your full name, title, company, and contact information at the end of your messages.

Think twice before hitting Send; a simple mistake in your content or distribution can cause major headaches.

When you're ready to distribute your message, pause to verify what you're doing before you click Send. Make sure you've included everyone necessary—and no one else. Did you click Reply All when you meant to click only Reply? The difference could be embarrassing or even career threatening. Don't include people in the Cc (courtesy copy) or Bcc (blind courtesy copy) fields unless you know how these features work. (Everyone who receives the message can see who is on the Cc line but not who is on the Bcc line.) Also, don't set the message priority to "high" or "urgent" unless your message is truly urgent. And if you intend to include an attachment, be sure that it is indeed attached.

Table 6.1 offers a number of helpful tips for effective email messages.

**TABLE 6.1** Tips for Effective Email Messages

**TIP**

When you request information or action, make it clear what you're asking for, why it's important, and how soon you need it; don't make your reader write back for details.

When responding to a request, either paraphrase the request or include enough of the original message to remind the reader what you're replying to.

If possible, avoid sending long, complex messages via email.

Adjust the level of formality to the message and the audience.

Activate a signature file, which automatically pastes your contact information into every message you create.

Don't let unread messages pile up in your in-basket.

Never type in all caps.

Don't overformat your messages with background colours, multicoloured type, unusual fonts, and so on.

Remember that messages can be forwarded anywhere and saved forever.

Use the "return receipt requested" feature only for the most critical messages.

Make sure your computer has up-to-date virus protection.

Pay attention to grammar, spelling, and capitalization.

Use acronyms sparingly.

**WHY IT'S IMPORTANT**

People will be tempted to ignore your messages if they're not clear about what you want or how soon you want it.

Some businesspeople get hundreds of email messages a day and may need reminding what your specific response is about.

Long messages are easier to read as attached reports or web content. Think of the number of people who read email on their smartphones.

Overly formal messages to colleagues can be perceived as stuffy and distant; overly informal messages to customers or top executives can be perceived as disrespectful.

A signature saves you the trouble of retyping vital information and ensures that recipients know how to reach you through other means. However, sometimes signature files get caught in spam filters.

You'll miss important information and create the impression that you're ignoring other people.

**ALL CAPS ARE INTERPRETED AS SHOUTING.**

Such messages can be difficult and annoying to read onscreen.

Don't let a moment of anger or poor judgment haunt you for the rest of your career.

This feature triggers a message back to you whenever someone receives or opens your message; many consider this an invasion of privacy.

One of the worst breaches of "netiquette" is infecting other computers because you haven't bothered to protect your own system.

Some people don't think email needs formal rules, but careless messages make you look unprofessional and can annoy readers. Write in complete sentences.

Shorthand such as IMHO (in my humble opinion) and LOL (laughing out loud) can be useful in informal correspondence with colleagues, but avoid using them in more formal messages.

## Instant Messaging and Text Messaging

Computer-based **instant messaging (IM)**, in which users' messages appear on each other's screens instantly, is used extensively for internal and external communication. IM is available in both stand-alone systems and as a function embedded in online meeting systems, collaboration systems, social networks, and other platforms. For conversational exchanges, it's hard to top the advantages of IM, and the technology is replacing both email and voice mail in many situations.<sup>35</sup> Business-grade IM systems offer a range of capabilities, including basic chat, *presence awareness* (the ability to quickly see which people are at their desks and available to IM), remote display of documents, video capabilities, remote control of other computers, automated newsfeeds from blogs and websites, and automated *bot* (derived from the word *robot*) capabilities in which a computer can carry on simple conversations.<sup>36</sup>

**Text messaging** has a number of applications in business as well, including marketing (alerting customers about new sale prices, for example), customer service (such as airline flight status, package tracking, and appointment reminders), security (for example, authenticating mobile banking transactions), crisis management (such as updating all employees working at a disaster scene), and process monitoring (alerting computer technicians to system failures, for example).<sup>37</sup>

While the following sections focus on IM, many of the benefits, risks, and guidelines that pertain to IM pertain to text messaging as well.

### Understanding the Benefits and Risks of IM

The benefits of IM include its capability for rapid response to urgent messages, lower cost than phone calls and email, ability to mimic conversation more closely than email, and availability on a wide range of devices.<sup>38</sup> In addition, because it more closely resembles one-on-one conversation, IM doesn't get misused as a one-to-many broadcast method as often as email does.<sup>39</sup>

The potential drawbacks of IM include security problems (computer viruses, network infiltration, and the possibility that sensitive messages might be intercepted by outsiders), the need for *user authentication* (making sure that online correspondents are really who they appear to be), the challenge of logging messages for later review and archiving, incompatibility between competing IM systems, and *spim* (unsolicited commercial messages, similar to email spam). Fortunately, with the growth of *enterprise instant messaging (EIM)*, or IM systems designed for large-scale corporate use, many of these problems are being overcome. However, security remains a significant concern for corporate IM systems.<sup>40</sup>

### Adapting the Three-Step Process for Successful IM

Although instant messages are often conceived, written, and sent within a matter of seconds, the principles of the three-step process still apply, particularly when communicating with customers and other important audiences:

- **Planning instant messages.** Except for simple exchanges, take a moment to plan IM “conversations” in much the same way you would plan an important oral conversation. A few seconds of planning can help you deliver information in a coherent, complete way that minimizes the number of individual messages required.
- **Writing instant messages.** As with email, the appropriate writing style for business IM is more formal than the style you may be accustomed to with personal IM or text messaging (see Figure 6.5). Your company might discourage the use of IM acronyms (such as FWIW for “for what it's worth” or HTH for “hope that helps”), particularly for IM with external audiences.
- **Completing instant messages.** Quickly scan it before sending, to make sure you don't have any missing or misspelled words and verify that your message is clear and complete.

To use IM effectively, keep in mind some important behavioural issues when relying on this medium: the potential for constant interruptions, the ease of accidentally mixing

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE 5

Describe the business benefits of instant messaging (IM) and identify guidelines for effective IM in the workplace.

IM is taking the place of email for routine communication in many companies.

Phone-based text messaging is fast and portable but not as versatile as computer-based IM.

IM offers many benefits:

- Rapid response
- Low cost
- Ability to mimic conversation
- Wide availability

FIGURE 6.5 Instant Messaging for Business Communication



When using IM, be aware of the potential for constant interruptions and wasted time.

Understand the guidelines for successful business IM before you begin to use it.

personal and business messages, the risk of being out of the loop (if a hot discussion or an impromptu meeting flares up when you're away from your PC or other IM device), and being at the mercy of other people's typing abilities.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the system you're using, you can make IM more efficient and effective by heeding these tips:<sup>42</sup>

- Be courteous in your use of IM; if you don't need an answer instantly, you can avoid interrupting someone by sending an email or other type of message instead.
- Unless a meeting is scheduled or you're expected to be available for other reasons, make yourself unavailable when you need to focus on other work.
- If you're not on a secure system, don't send confidential information using IM.
- Be extremely careful about sending personal messages—they have a tendency to pop up on other people's computers at embarrassing moments.
- Don't use IM for important but impromptu meetings if you can't verify that everyone concerned will be available.
- Don't use IM for lengthy, complex messages; email is better for those.
- Try to avoid carrying on multiple IM conversations at one time, to minimize the chance of sending messages to the wrong people or making one person wait while you tend to another conversation.
- Follow all security guidelines designed to keep your company's information and systems safe from attack.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE 6**

Describe the use of blogging and microblogging in business communication and briefly explain how to adapt the three-step process to blogging.

## Creating Effective Business Blogs

**Blogs**, online journals that are easier to personalize and update than conventional websites, have become a major force in business communication. Millions of business-oriented blogs are now in operation, and blogs have become an important source of



information for consumers and professionals alike.<sup>43</sup> Good business blogs and microblogs pay close attention to several important elements:

- **Communicating with personal style and an authentic voice.** Most business messages designed for large audiences are carefully scripted and written in a “corporate voice” that is impersonal and objective. In contrast, successful business blogs are written by individuals and exhibit their personal style. Audiences relate to this fresh approach and often build closer emotional bonds with the blogger’s organization as a result.
- **Delivering new information quickly.** Blogging tools let you post new material as soon as you create it or find it. This feature not only allows you to respond quickly when needed—such as during a corporate crisis—but also lets your audiences know that active communication is taking place. Blogs that don’t offer a continuous stream of new and interesting content are quickly ignored in today’s online environment.
- **Choosing topics of peak interest to audiences.** Successful blogs cover topics that readers care about.
- **Encouraging audiences to join the conversation.** Not all blogs invite comments, although most do, and many bloggers consider comments to be an essential feature. Blog comments can be a valuable source of news, information, and insights. To guard against comments that are not helpful or appropriate, many bloggers review all comments and post only the most helpful or interesting ones.

Most business blogs invite readers to leave comments.

## Understanding the Business Applications of Blogging

Blogs are a potential solution whenever you have a continuing stream of information to share with an online audience—and particularly when you want the audience to have the opportunity to respond. Here are some of the many ways businesses are using blogs for internal and external communication:<sup>44</sup>

The business applications of blogs include a wide range of internal and external communication tasks.

- **Anchoring the social media presence.** As noted on page 125, the multiple threads of any social media program should be anchored in a central hub the company or individual owns and controls. Blogs make an ideal social media hub.
- **Project management and team communication.** Using blogs is a good way to keep project teams up to date, particularly when team members are geographically dispersed.
- **Company news.** Companies can use blogs to keep employees informed about general business matters, from facility news to benefit updates. Blogs also serve as online community forums, giving everyone in the company a chance to raise questions and voice concerns.
- **Customer support.** Building on the tradition of online customer support forums that have been around since the earliest days of the internet, customer support blogs answer questions, offer tips and advice, and inform customers about new products. Also, many companies monitor the blogosphere (and Twitter), looking for complaints and responding with offers to help dissatisfied customers.<sup>45</sup>
- **Public relations and media relations.** Many company employees and executives now share company news with both the general public and journalists via their blogs.
- **Recruiting.** Using a blog is a great way to let potential employees know more about your company, the people who work there, and the nature of the company culture. Conversely, employers often find and evaluate the blogs and microblogs of prospective employees, making blogging a great way for you to build a name for yourself within your industry or profession.
- **Policy and issue discussions.** Executive blogs in particular provide a public forum for discussing legislation, regulations, and other broad issues of interest to an organization.
- **Crisis communication.** Using blogs is a convenient way to provide up-to-the-minute information during emergencies, correct misinformation, or respond to rumours.

Blogs are an ideal medium for *word-of-mouth marketing*, the spread of promotional messages from one audience member to another.



## REAL-TIME UPDATES

Learn More by Visiting This Website

Guidelines for trouble-free blogging

The free *Legal Guide for Bloggers* can help bloggers steer clear of legal problems, including improper use of intellectual property. Go to <http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6> and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student StudyTools.

- **Market research.** Blogs can be a clever way to solicit feedback from customers and experts in the marketplace. In addition to using their own blogs to solicit feedback, today's companies should monitor blogs that are likely to discuss them, their executives, and their products.
- **Brainstorming.** Online brainstorming via blogs offers a way for people to toss around ideas and build on each other's contributions.
- **Employee engagement.** Blogs can enhance communication across all levels of a company. For example, as part of a program to align its corporate culture with changes in the global beverage market, Coca-Cola solicited feedback via blog comments from more than 20 000 employees.<sup>46</sup>
- **Customer education.** Blogs are a great way to help current and potential customers understand and use your products and services. This function can improve sales and support productivity as well, by reducing the need for one-on-one communication.
- **Word-of-mouth marketing.** Bloggers often make a point of providing links to other blogs and websites that interest them, giving marketers a great opportunity to have their messages spread by enthusiasts. (Online word-of-mouth marketing is often called *viral marketing*, but viral marketing is not really an accurate metaphor. Biological viruses spread from host to host on their own, whereas these virtual "viruses" are spread *voluntarily* by their "hosts." The distinction is critical, because you need to give people a good reason—good content, in other words—to pass along your message.)<sup>47</sup>
  - **Influencing traditional media news coverage.** According to social media consultant Tamar Weinberg, "the more prolific bloggers who provide valuable and consistent content are often considered experts in their subject matter" and are often called upon when journalists need insights into various topics.<sup>48</sup>
- **Community building.** Communities of readers can "grow" around a popular blog, as readers participate in the flow of ideas via comments on various posts.

The uses of blogs are limited only by your creativity, so be on the lookout for new ways you can use them to foster positive relationships with colleagues, customers, and other important audiences (see Figure 6.6).

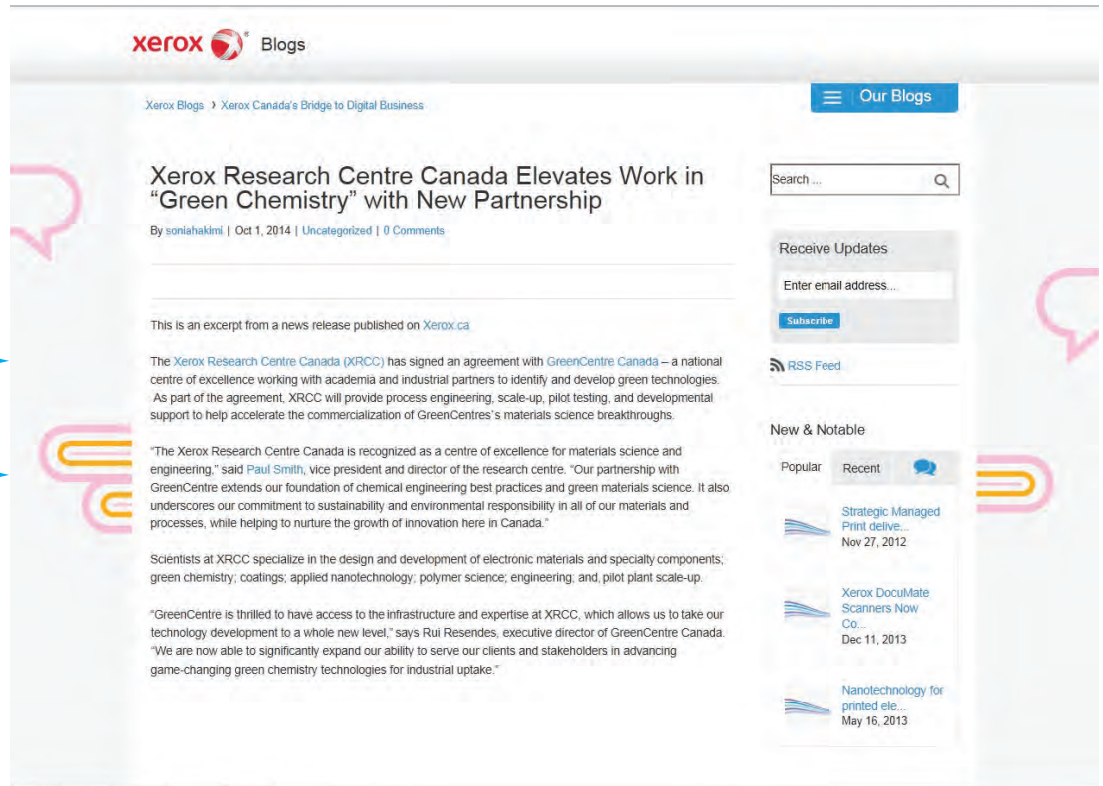
## Adapting the Three-Step Process for Successful Blogging

The three-step writing process is easy to adapt to blogging tasks. The planning step is particularly important when you're launching a blog because you're planning an entire communication channel, not just a single message. Pay close attention to your audience, your purpose, and your scope:

Before you launch a blog, make sure you have a clear understanding of your target audience, the purpose of your blog, and the scope of subjects you plan to cover.

- **Audience.** Except with team blogs and other efforts that have an obvious and well-defined audience, defining the target audience for a blog can be challenging. You want an audience large enough to justify the time you'll be investing but narrow enough that you can provide a clear focus for the blog. For instance, if you work for a firm that develops computer games, would you focus your blog on "hardcore" players, the types who spend thousands of dollars on super-fast PCs optimized for video games, or would you broaden the reach to include all video gamers? The decision often comes down to business strategy.
- **Purpose.** A business blog needs to have a business-related purpose that is important to your company and to your chosen audience. Moreover, the purpose has to be something that can drive the blog's content for months or years, rather than focus on a single event or an issue of only temporary interest. For instance, if you're

FIGURE 6.6 A Sample Business Blog



Source: Xerox Research Centre Canada Elevates Work in “Green Chemistry” with New Partnership, <http://digitalbusiness.blogs.xerox.com/2014/10/01/xerox-research-centre-canada-elevates-work-in-green-chemistry-with-new-partnership/>. Xerox Canada Ltd.

a technical expert, you might create a blog to give the audience tips and techniques for using your company’s products more effectively—a never-ending subject that’s important to both you and your audience. This would be the general purpose of your blog; each posting would have a specific purpose within the context of that general purpose. Finally, if you are not writing an official company blog but rather blogging as an individual employee, make sure you understand your employer’s blogging guidelines. As with email and IM, more and more companies are putting policies in place to prevent employee mistakes with blogging.<sup>49</sup>

- **Scope.** Defining the scope of your blog can be a bit tricky. You want to cover a subject area that is broad enough to offer discussion possibilities for months or years but narrow enough to have an identifiable focus.

After you begin writing your blog, the careful planning needs to continue with each message. Unless you’re posting to a restricted-access blog, such as an internal blog on a company intranet, you can never be sure who might see your posts. Other bloggers might link to them months or years later.

Use a comfortable, personal writing style. Blog audiences don’t want to hear from your company; they want to hear from *you*. Bear in mind, though, that comfortable does not mean careless. Sloppy writing damages your credibility. Successful blog content also needs to be interesting, valuable to readers, and as brief as possible.<sup>50</sup> If you don’t have all the information

## REAL-TIME UPDATES

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**Nine startups that know how to blog**

These growing companies show how to do business blogging effectively. See how businesses large and small are putting blogs to work. Go to <http://real-timeupdates.com/bce6> and click on Learn More. If you are using MyBCommLab, you can access Real-Time Updates within each chapter or under Student Study Tools.

Write blog postings in a comfortable—but not careless—style.

TABLE 6.2 Tips for Effective Business Blogging

TIP	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT
Don't blog without a clear plan.	Without a clear plan, your blog is likely to wander from topic to topic and fail to build a sense of community with your audience.
Post frequently; the whole point of a blog is fresh material.	If you won't have a constant supply of new information or new links, create a traditional website instead.
Make it about your audience and the issues that are important to them.	Readers want to know how your blog will help them, entertain them, or give them a chance to communicate with others who have similar interests.
Write in an authentic voice; never create an artificial character who supposedly writes a blog.	<i>Flogs</i> , or fake blogs, violate the spirit of blogging, show disrespect for your audience, and will turn audiences against you as soon as they uncover the truth. Fake blogs used to promote products are now illegal in some countries.
Link generously—but carefully.	Providing interesting links to other blogs and websites is a fundamental aspect of blogging, but make sure the links will be of value to your readers and don't point to inappropriate material.
Keep it brief.	Most online readers don't have the patience to read lengthy reports. Rather than writing long, report-style posts, write brief posts that link to in-depth reports on your website.
Don't post anything you wouldn't want the entire world to see.	Future employers, government regulators, competitors, journalists, and community critics are just a few of the people who might eventually see what you've written.
Don't engage in blatant product promotion.	Readers who think they're being advertised to will stop reading.
Take time to write compelling, specific headlines for your postings.	Readers usually decide within a couple of seconds whether to read your postings; boring or vague headlines will turn them away instantly.
Pay attention to spelling, grammar, and mechanics.	No matter how smart or experienced you are, poor-quality writing undermines your credibility with intelligent audiences.
Respond to criticism openly and honestly.	Hiding sends the message that you don't have a valid response to the criticism. If your critics are wrong, patiently explain why you think they're wrong. If they are right, explain how you'll fix the situation.
Listen and learn.	If you don't take the time to analyze the comments people leave on your blog or the comments other bloggers make about you, you're missing out on one of the most valuable aspects of blogging.
Respect intellectual property.	Improperly using material you don't own is not only unethical but can be illegal as well.
Be scrupulously honest and careful with facts.	Honesty is an absolute requirement for every ethical business communicator, of course, but you need to be extra careful online because inaccuracies (both intentional and unintentional) are likely to be discovered quickly and shared widely. If you review products on your blog, disclose any beneficial relationships you have with the companies that make those products.

yourself, provide links to other blogs and websites that supply relevant information. In fact, *media curation*, selecting content to share in much the same way that museum curators decide which pieces of art to display, is one of the most valuable aspects of blogging.

Completing messages for your blog is usually quite easy. Evaluate the content and readability of your message, proofread to correct any errors, and post using your blogging system's tools, including one or more *newsfeed options* such as RSS, so that your audience can automatically receive headlines and summaries of new blog posts. Whatever blogging system you are using can provide guidance on setting up newsfeeds.

Finally, make your material easier to find by **tagging** it with descriptive words. Your readers can then click on these "content labels" to find additional posts on those topics.

Tags are usually displayed with each post, and they can also be grouped in a *tag cloud* display, which shows all the tags in use on your blog. Visitors to your blog who want to read everything you've written about recruiting just click on that word to see all your posts on that subject. Tagging can also help audiences locate your posts on blog trackers such as Technorati (<http://technorati.com>) or on **social bookmarking** or social news sites such as Delicious (<http://delicious.com>) and Digg ([www.digg.com](http://www.digg.com)).

Table 6.2 summarizes a number of suggestions for successful blogging.

## Microblogging

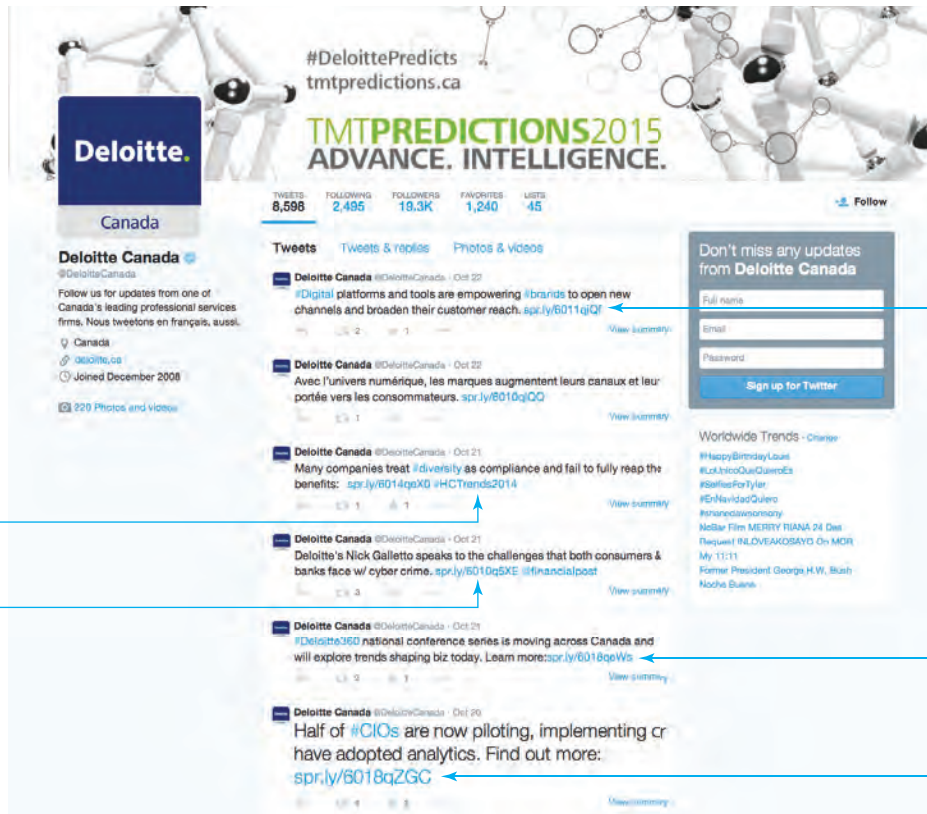
A **microblog** is a variation on blogging in which messages are sharply restricted to specific character counts. Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is the best known of these systems, but many others exist. Some companies have private microblogging systems for internal use only; these systems are sometimes referred to as *enterprise microblogging* or *internal micromessaging*.<sup>51</sup>

Many of the concepts of regular blogging apply to microblogging as well, although the severe length limitations call for a different approach to composition. Microblog messages often involve short summaries or teasers that provide links to more information. In addition, microblogs tend to have a stronger social aspect that makes it easier for writers and readers to forward messages and for communities to form around individual writers.<sup>52</sup>

Like regular blogging, microblogging quickly caught on with business users and is now a mainstream business medium. Microblogs are used for virtually all of the blog applications mentioned on pages 133–134. In addition, microblogs are frequently used for providing company updates, offering coupons and notice of sales, presenting tips on product usage, sharing relevant and interesting information from experts, serving as the back-channel in meetings and presentations, and announcing new blog posts (see Figure 6.7).

Like Facebook and YouTube, Twitter quickly became an important business communication medium.

**FIGURE 6.7** Business Applications of Microblogging



Links to article on one of Deloitte's consulting practice areas

Links to advice on challenges facing businesses

Links to article on Deloitte's website

Links to conference information and invitation on Deloitte's website

Links to article on important business trend in one of Deloitte's areas of expertise

Source: Twitter, <https://twitter.com/DeloitteCanada>

By following top names in your field, you can customize Twitter as your own real-time news source.<sup>53</sup> Customer service is becoming a popular use for Twitter as well, thanks to its ease, speed, and the option to switch between public tweets and private direct messages as the situation warrants.<sup>54</sup> The social networking aspect of Twitter and other microblogs also makes them good for *crowdsourcing* research questions, asking ones' followers for input or advice.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the ease of *retweeting*, the practice of forwarding messages from other Twitter users, is the microblogging equivalent of sharing other content from other bloggers via media curation.

In addition to its usefulness as a stand-alone system, Twitter is also integrated with other social media systems and a variety of publishing and reading tools and services. Many of these systems use the informal Twitter feature known as the *hashtag* (the # symbol followed by a word or phrase), which makes it easy for people to label and search for topics of interest and to monitor ongoing Twitter conversations about particular topics.

Although microblogs are designed to encourage spontaneous communication, when you're using the medium for business communication, don't just tweet out whatever pops into your head. Make sure messages are part of your overall communication strategy. Twitter followers consider tweets that are entertaining, surprising, informative, or engaging (such as asking followers for advice) as the most valuable. In contrast, the least-valuable tweets tend to be complaints, conversations between the Twitter account owner and a specific follower, and relatively pointless messages such as saying "good morning."<sup>56</sup>

Don't let the speed and simplicity of microblogging lull you into making careless mistakes; every message should support your business communication objectives.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE 7

Explain how to adapt the three-step writing process for podcasts.

## Podcasting

**Podcasting** is the process of recording audio or video files and distributing them online via RSS subscriptions, in the same way that blog posts are automatically fed to subscribers. Podcasting combines the media richness of voice or visual communication with the convenience of portability. Audiences can listen to or watch podcasts on a blog or website, or they can download them to phones or portable music players to consume on the go. Particularly with audio podcasts, the hands-off, eyes-off aspect makes them great for listening to while driving or exercising.

The most obvious use of podcasting is to replace existing audio and video messages, such as one-way teleconferences in which a speaker provides information without expecting to engage in conversation with the listeners. Training is another good use of podcasting; you may have already taken a college course via podcasts. Podcasting is also a great way to offer free previews of seminars and training classes.<sup>57</sup> Many business writers and consultants use podcasting to build their personal brands and to enhance their other product and service offerings. You can find a wide selection of these on iTunes, many of which are free (go to the Podcasting section and select the Business category).

Although it might not seem obvious at first, the three-step writing process adapts quite nicely to podcasting. First, focus the planning step on analyzing the situation, gathering the information you'll need, and organizing your material. One vital planning step depends on whether you intend to create podcasts for limited use and distribution (such as a weekly audio update to your virtual team) or to create a **podcasting channel** with regular recordings on a consistent theme, designed for a wider public audience. As with planning a blog, if you intend to create a podcasting channel, be sure to think through the range of topics you want to address over time to verify that you have a sustainable purpose. If you bounce from one theme to another, you risk losing your audience.<sup>58</sup> Maintaining a consistent schedule is also important; listeners will stop paying attention if you don't deliver regular updates.<sup>59</sup>

As you organize the content for a podcast, pay close attention to previews, transitions, and reviews. These steering devices are especially vital in audio recordings because audio lacks the "street signs" (such as headings) that audiences rely on in print media. Moreover, scanning back and forth to find specific parts of an audio or video message is much

Podcasting can be used to deliver a wide range of audio and video messages.

The three-step process adapts quite well to podcasting.

more difficult than with textual messages, so you need to do everything possible to make sure your audience successfully receives and interprets your message on the first try.

One of the attractions of podcasting is the conversational, person-to-person feel of the recordings, so unless you need to capture exact wording, speaking from an outline and notes rather than a prepared script is often the best choice. However, no one wants to listen to rambling podcasts that take several minutes to get to the topic or struggle to make a point, so don't try to make up your content on the fly. Effective podcasts, like effective stories, have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

The completing step is where podcasting differs most dramatically from written communication, for the obvious reason that you are recording and distributing audio or video files. Particularly for more formal podcasts, start by revising your script or thinking through your speaking notes before you begin to record. The closer you can get to recording your podcasts in one take, the more productive you'll be.

Most personal computers, smartphones, and other devices now have basic audio recording capability, including built-in microphones, and free editing software is available online (at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>, for example). If you need higher production quality or greater flexibility, you'll need additional pieces of hardware and software. These can include an audio processor (to filter out extraneous noise and otherwise improve the audio signal), a mixer (to combine multiple audio or video signals), a better microphone, more sophisticated recording and editing software, and perhaps some physical changes in your recording location to improve the acoustics.

Podcasts can be distributed in several ways, including through media stores such as iTunes, by dedicated podcast hosting services, or on a blog with content that supports the podcast channel. If you distribute your podcast on a blog, you can provide additional information and use the commenting feature of the blog to encourage feedback from your audience.<sup>60</sup>

Steering devices such as transitions, previews, and reviews are vital in podcasts.

Plan your podcast content carefully; editing is more difficult with podcasts than with textual messages.

For basic podcasts, your computer and perhaps even your smartphone might have most of the hardware you already need, and you can download recording software.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Check Your Progress

### 1 OBJECTIVE Identify the major electronic media used for brief business messages and describe the nine compositional modes needed for electronic media.

Electronic media for short business messages include social networking and community participation websites, email, instant messaging (IM), text messaging, blogging and microblogging, podcasting, and online video. The nine compositional modes used in electronic communication are conversations, comments and critiques, orientations, summaries, reference materials, narratives, teasers, status updates and announcements, and tutorials.

### 2 OBJECTIVE Describe the use of social networks in business communication.

Businesses now use a variety of social networks, including well-known public networks such as Facebook, more business-oriented networks such as LinkedIn, as well as a variety of specialized networks, single-company networks for customers, and

internal employee-only networks. The business communication applications of social networks are important and diverse; major uses include collaborating, gathering market intelligence, recruiting employees, connecting with business partners, marketing, and fostering brand communities.

### 3 OBJECTIVE Explain how companies and business professionals can use information and media sharing websites.

User-generated content sites such as YouTube allow companies to host media items (such as videos) that customers and other stakeholders can view, comment on, and share. Media curation sites allow professionals and consumers with expertise or interest in a particular field to collect and republish material on a particular topic. Community Q&A sites give individuals the opportunity to build their personal brands by providing expertise, and they give companies the chance to address customer complaints and correct misinformation.

**4 OBJECTIVE** Describe the evolving role of email in business communication and explain how to adapt the three-step writing process to email messages.

As the earliest widely available electronic written medium, email was applied to a broad range of communication tasks—some it was well suited for and some it wasn't. Over time, newer media such as instant messaging, blogs, and social networks have been taking over some of these tasks, but email remains a vital medium that is optimum for many private, short- to medium-length messages.

The three-step process adapts easily to email communication. One of the most important planning decisions in crafting email messages is making sure every message has a valuable purpose. Any key planning decision is to follow the chain of command in your organization; emailing over your boss's head is a good way to stir up resentment. When writing email messages, bear in mind that the expectations of writing quality and formality are higher in business email. Also, pay close attention to the wording of an email message's subject line; it often determines whether and when recipients open and read the message. Effective subject lines are both informative (concisely identifying what the message is about) and compelling (giving readers a reason to read the message). Completing email messages is straightforward. Proof and revise messages (particularly important ones), and make sure you distribute the message to the right people.

**5 OBJECTIVE** Describe the business benefits of instant messaging (IM) and identify guidelines for effective IM in the workplace.

The benefits of IM include its capability for rapid response to urgent messages, lower cost than phone calls and email, ability to mimic conversation more closely than email, and availability on a wide range of devices.

As with email, business IM needs to be treated as a professional medium to ensure safe and effective communication. Be courteous in your use of IM to avoid interrupting others unnecessarily. Make yourself unavailable when you need to focus on other work, refrain from sending confidential information if you're not on a secure system, refrain from sending personal messages at work, avoid using IM for lengthy and complex messages, avoid carrying on multiple IM conversations at once, avoid IM slang

with anyone other than close colleagues, and follow security guidelines.

**6 OBJECTIVE** Describe the use of blogging and microblogging in business communication and briefly explain how to adapt the three-step process to blogging.

Blogs are used in numerous ways in business today, such as for project management and team communication, company news, customer support, public relations and media relations, employee recruiting, policy and issue discussions, crisis communication, market research, brainstorming, employee engagement, viral marketing, influencing traditional media news coverage, and community building. Microblogs such as Twitter are used for many of the same purposes as conventional blogging, along with electronic coupons, sale announcements, one-on-one customer service queries, and customized news channels created by following experts of interest. Microblogs can also serve as the backchannel during meetings and presentations.

The three-step process adapts readily to blogging. In planning, pay particular attention to defining your audience, identifying the overall purpose of your blog and specific purposes of each post, and establishing a scope that is narrow enough to be focused but broad enough to afford a steady supply of topics. Write in a personal, authentic style. Completing involves the usual proofing and revising, along with tasks needed to distribute your posts via newsfeeds.

**7 OBJECTIVE** Explain how to adapt the three-step writing process for podcasts.

Although you record audio or video when creating podcasts rather than write messages, the three-step process is an effective approach to develop podcasts as well. Focus the planning step on analyzing the situation, gathering the information you'll need, and organizing your material. If you plan to create a series of podcasts on a given theme, make sure you've identified a range of topics extensive enough to keep you going over time. As you organize and begin to think about the words or images you'll use as content, pay close attention to previews, transitions, and reviews so that audiences don't get lost while listening or watching. Finally, consider the necessary level of production quality; good-quality podcasts usually require some specialized hardware and software.



## Practise Your Grammar

Effective business communication starts with strong grammar skills. To improve your grammar skills, go to MyCanadianBusCommLab or Grammar-on-the-Go,

where you'll find exercises and diagnostic tests to help you produce clear, effective communication.

## Test Your Knowledge

To review chapter content related to each question, refer to the indicated Learning Objective.

1. In what situations might a printed memo or letter be preferable to an electronic message? **L.O.1**
2. How do the compositional modes of orientations, summaries, and teasers differ? **L.O.2**
3. Does the three-step writing process apply to IM? Why or why not? **L.O.5**

## Apply Your Knowledge

To review chapter content related to each question, refer to the indicated Learning Objective.

1. Given the strict limits on length, should all your microblogging messages function as teasers that link to more detailed information on a blog or website? Why or why not? **L.O.1**
2. Is leveraging your connections on social networks for business purposes ethical? Why or why not? **L.O.3**
3. Communication on a major project is suffering because several team members are in the habit of writing cryptic or careless instant messages that often force recipients to engage in several rounds of follow-up messaging to figure out what the sender had in mind. As project leader, you've spoken with these team members about the need to write clearer messages, but they respond that careful planning and writing defeats the whole purpose of *instant* messaging. How should you handle the situation? **L.O.5**
4. If one of the benefits of blogging is the personal, intimate style of writing, is it a good idea to limit your creativity by adhering to conventional rules of grammar, spelling, and mechanics? Why or why not? **L.O.6**
5. A former classmate reached out to you through LinkedIn and asked for a favour: Would you be willing to review her company's motorcycle accessories on your popular motorsports blog? What information would you need to make this decision, and how could you be sure you are making an ethical choice? **L.O.6**

## Practise Your Skills

### EXERCISES FOR PERFECTING YOUR WRITING

To review chapter content related to each set of exercises, refer to the indicated Learning Objective.

1. **Planning: Creating an Audience Profile, Selecting Media L.O.1, Chapter 3** You are in charge of public relations for a cruise line that operates out of Vancouver. You are shocked to read a letter in a local newspaper from a disgruntled passenger, complaining about the service and entertainment on a recent cruise. You will have to respond to these publicized criticisms in some way.
  - a. What audiences will you need to consider in your response?
  - b. For each of these audiences, which medium (or media) should you use to send your message?
2. **Media Skills: Blogging L.O.5** The members of the project team you are leading have enthusiastically embraced blogging as a communication medium. Unfortunately, as emotions heat up during the project, some of the blog postings are getting too casual, too personal, and even sloppy. Because your boss and other managers around the company also read this project blog, you don't want the team to look unprofessional in anyone's eyes. Revise the following blog posting so that it communicates in a more businesslike manner while retaining the informal, conversational tone of a blog (be sure to correct any spelling and punctuation mistakes you find as well).

Well, to the profound surprise of absolutely nobody, we are not going to be able meet the June 1 commitment to ship 100 steel tables to Ocean's Cannery. (For those of you who have been living in a cave the past six months, we have been fighting to get our hands on enough high-grade chromium steel to meet our production schedule.) Sure enough, we got news, this morning that we will only get enough for 30 tables. Yes, we look like fools for not being able to follow through on promises we made to the customer, but no, this didn't have to happen. Six month's ago, purchasing warned us about shrinking supplies and suggested we advance-buy as much as we would need for the next 12 months, or so. We naturally tried to follow their advice, but just as naturally were shot down by the bean counters at corporate who trotted out the policy about never buying more than three months worth of materials in advance. Of course, it'll be us—not the bean counters who'll take the flak when everybody starts asking why revenues are down next quarter and why Ocean's Cannery is talking to our competitors!!! Maybe, some day this company will get its head out of the sand and realize that we need to have some financial flexibility in order to compete.

- 3. Collaboration: Working in Teams; Planning: Selecting Media L.O.1, Chapter 2** Working with at least two other students, identify the best medium to use for each of the following messages. For each of

these message needs, choose a medium that you think would work effectively and explain your choice. (More than one medium could work in some cases; just be able to support your particular choice.)

- a. A technical support service for people trying to use their digital music players
  - b. A message of condolence to the family of an employee who passed away recently
  - c. A collection of infographics from a variety of sources on the state of the consumer electronics industry
  - d. A series of observations on the state of the consumer electronics industry
  - e. A series of messages, questions, and answers surrounding the work of a project team
- 4. Media Skills: Writing Email Subject Lines L.O.3** Using your imagination to make up whatever details you need, revise the following email subject lines to make them more informative:
- a. New budget figures
  - b. Marketing brochure—your opinion
  - c. Production schedule

## ACTIVITIES

Each activity is labelled according to the primary skill or skills you will need to use. To review relevant chapter content, you can refer to the indicated Learning Objective. In some instances, supporting information will be found in another chapter, as indicated.

- 1. Media Skills: Email L.O.3** The following email message contains numerous errors related to what you've learned about planning and writing business messages. First, list the flaws you find in this version. Then use the following steps to plan and write a better memo.

TO: Felicia August <b\_august@evertrust.com>

SUBJECT: Compliance with new break procedure

Some of you may not like the rules about break times; however, we determined that keeping track of employees while they took breaks at times they determined rather than regular breaks at prescribed times was not working as well as we would have liked it to work. The new rules are not going to be an option. If you do not follow the new rules, you could be docked from your pay for hours when you turned up missing, since your direct supervisor will not be able to tell whether you were on a "break" or not and will assume that you have walked away from your job. We cannot be responsible for any errors that result from your inattentiveness to the new rules. I have already heard complaints from some of you and I hope this memo will end this issue once and for all. The decision has already been made.

Starting Monday, January 2, you will all be required to take a regular 15-minute break in the morning and again in the afternoon, and a regular thirty-minute lunch at the times specified by your supervisor, NOT when you think you need a break or when you "get around to it."

There will be no exceptions to this new rule!

Felicia August

Manager

Billing and accounting

- a. Describe the flaws you discovered in this email message.
- b. Develop a plan for rewriting the message. Use the following steps to organize your efforts before you begin writing:
  - i. Determine the purpose.
  - ii. Identify and analyze your audience.
  - iii. Define the main idea.
  - iv. Outline the major supporting points.
  - v. Choose between a direct and an indirect approach.
- c. Now rewrite the email message. Don't forget to revise your own work before you turn it in.

- 2. Media Skills: Instant Messaging L.O.4** Review the following IM exchange and explain how the customer service agent could have handled the situation more effectively.

**Agent:** Thanks for contacting Home Exercise Equipment. What's up?

**Customer:** I'm having trouble assembling my home gym.

**Agent:** I hear that a lot! LOL

**Customer:** So is it me or the gym?

**Agent:** Well, let's see ~COLOR~[Green]. Where are you stuck?

**Customer:** The crossbar that connects the vertical pillars doesn't fit.

**Agent:** What do you mean doesn't fit?

**Customer:** It doesn't fit. It's not long enough to reach across the pillars.

**Agent:** Maybe you assembled the pillars in the wrong place. Or maybe we sent the wrong crossbar.

**Customer:** How do I tell?

**Agent:** The parts aren't labelled so could be tough. Do you have a measuring tape? Tell me how long your crossbar is.

- 3. Media Skills: Blogging L.O.5** Identify the numerous errors made by the writer of the following blog posting. List them and then plan and write a better post.

[headline]

Get Ready!

[post]

We are hoping to be back at work soon, with everything running smoothly, same production schedule and no late projects or missed deadlines. So you need to clean out your desk,

put your stuff in boxes, and clean off the walls. You can put the items you had up on your walls in boxes, also.

We have provided boxes. The move will happen this weekend. We'll be in our new offices when you arrive on Monday.

We will not be responsible for personal belongings during the move.

- a. Describe the flaws you discovered in this blog post.
- b. Develop a plan for rewriting the post. Use the following steps to organize your efforts before you begin writing:
  - i. Determine the purpose.
  - ii. Identify and analyze your audience.
  - iii. Define the main idea.
  - iv. Outline the major supporting points.
  - v. Choose between direct and indirect approaches.
- c. Now rewrite the post. Don't forget to revise your own work before you turn it in.

- 4. Media Skills: Podcasting L.O.6** You've recently begun recording a weekly podcast to share information with your large and far-flung staff. After a month, you ask for feedback from several of your subordinates, and you're disappointed to learn that some people stopped listening to the podcast after the first couple of weeks. Someone eventually admits that many staffers feel the recordings are too long and rambling, and the information they contain isn't valuable enough to justify the time it takes to listen. You aren't pleased, but you want to improve. An assistant transcribes the introduction to last week's podcast so you can review it. You immediately see two problems. Revise the introduction based on what you've learned in this chapter.

So there I am, having lunch with Selma Gill, who just joined and took over the Atlantic sales region from Jackson Ho. In walks our beloved CEO with Selma's old boss at Uni-Plex; turns out they were finalizing a deal to co-brand our products and theirs and to set up a joint distribution program in all four domestic regions. Pretty funny, huh? Selma left Uni-Plex because she wanted sell our

products instead, and now she's back selling her old stuff, too. Anyway, try to chat with her when you can; she knows the biz inside and out and probably can offer insight into just about any sales challenge you might be running up against. We'll post more info on the co-brand deal next week; should be a boost for all of us. Other than those two news items, the other big news this week is the change in commission reporting. I'll go into the details in minute, but when you log onto the intranet, you'll now see your sales results split out by product line and industry

sector. Hope this helps you see where you're doing well and where you might beef things up a bit. Oh yeah, I almost forgot the most important bit. Speaking of our beloved CEO, Thomas is going to be our guest of honour, so to speak, at the quarterly sales meeting next week and wants an update on how petroleum prices are affecting customer behaviour. Each district manager should be ready with a brief report. After I go through the commission reporting scheme, I'll outline what you need to prepare.

## CASES

Apply the three-step writing process to the following cases, as assigned by your instructor.

### ■ Social Networking Skills

#### 1. Media Skills: Social Networking; Media Skills: Microblogging L.O. ②, L.O. ⑤

Foursquare (<http://foursquare.com/>) is one of the leading providers of location-based social networking services. Millions of people use Foursquare for social engagement and friendly competition, and many business owners are starting to recognize the marketing potential of having people who are on the move in local areas broadcasting their locations and sharing information about stores, restaurants, clubs, and other merchants.

**YOUR TASK** Review the information on Foursquare's Merchant Platform at <http://foursquare.com/business/venues>. Now write four brief messages, no more than 140 characters long (including spaces). The first should summarize the benefits to stores, restaurants, and other "brick and mortar" businesses of participating in Foursquare, and the next three messages should convey three compelling points that support that overall benefit statement. If your class is set up with private Twitter accounts, use your private account to send your messages. Otherwise, email your four messages to your instructor or post them on your class blog, as your instructor directs.

### ■ Social Networking Skills

#### 2. Media Skills: Social Networking; Online Etiquette L.O. ②, Chapter 2

Employees who take pride in their work are a practically priceless resource for any business. However, pride can sometimes manifest itself in negative ways

when employees come under criticism—and public criticism is a fact of life in social media. Imagine that your company has recently experienced a rash of product quality problems, and these problems have generated some unpleasant and occasionally unfair criticism on a variety of social media sites. Someone even set up a Facebook page specifically to give customers a place to vent their frustrations.

You and your public relations team jumped into action, responding to complaints with offers to provide replacement products and help customers who have been affected by the quality problems. Everything seemed to be going as well as could be expected, when you were checking a few industry blogs one evening and discovered that two engineers in your company's product design lab have been responding to complaints on their own. They identified themselves as company employees and defended their product design, blaming the company's production department and even criticizing several customers for lacking the skills needed to use such a sophisticated product. Within a matter of minutes, you see their harsh comments being retweeted and reposted on multiple sites, only fueling the fire of negative feedback against your firm. Needless to say, you are horrified.

**YOUR TASK** You manage to reach the engineers by private message and tell them to stop posting messages, but you realize you have a serious training issue on your hands. Write a post for the internal company blog that advises employees on how to respond appropriately when they are representing the company online. Use your imagination to make up any details you need.

## ■ Social Networking Skills

### 3. Media Skills: Social Networking L.O.2

Business networking websites such as [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com), [www.ryze.com](http://www.ryze.com), and [www.spoke.com](http://www.spoke.com) have become popular places for professionals to make connections that would be difficult or impossible to make without the internet. An important aspect of business networking is being able to provide a clear description of your professional background and interests. For example, a manufacturing consultant can list the industries in which she has experience, the types of projects she has worked on, and the nature of work she'd like to pursue in the future (such as a full-time position for a company or additional independent projects).

**YOUR TASK** Write a brief statement to introduce yourself, including your educational background, your job history, and the types of connections you'd like to make. You can “fast forward” to your graduation and list your degree, the business specialty you plan to pursue, and any relevant experience. If you have business experience already, use that information instead. Make sure your statement is clear, concise (no more than two sentences), and compelling so that anyone looking for someone like you would want to get in touch with you after reading your introduction.

### 4. Media Skills: Social Networking; Microblogging L.O.6

You belong to a community group that promotes local and organic producers. One of your big success stories is the summer farmers' markets that started in your neighbourhood but now happen throughout the region. For the last few months, your group has been waiting for a response to an application you submitted for federal funding to stage a community fair that would promote local organic farmers and businesses that have sustainable business practices. The target is to get 50 businesses to participate in a one-day event, so the call you just received from your president, Johanna Prozski, was just what you were waiting to hear. “Good news,” she said. “We got our federal grant for the fair!”

This is good news—you now have the rest of the funds needed to get the fair going. “This is exciting! It's going to happen! We need Kira, Puru, and Meghan to begin calling companies to sell them a booth—it'll cost 125 bucks for a booth—which is a good deal,” exclaimed Johanna.

“I agree,” you replied. “Showcasing your company for that small amount is a good deal.”

“Yeah, we'll get somewhere around 800 to 1000 people out, no problem, especially if the surrounding communities get into this event too,” offered Johanna.

“What's the timeline for our people to be calling the companies they have been assigned?” you asked.

“It'd be good to know which companies are committed within one month,” replied Johanna. “Will you let the group know the news and who needs to do what?”

“Sure, I can do that,” you replied. “Remind me of the fair venue details.”

“Well—we're in for the Heritage Hall on Main Street on March 30, and I believe we have it from 10 to 4. Make sure everyone knows Dan offered to order the poster printing and Maurice is on for getting the city licence and permit for the event,” she instructed. “And Shari agreed to price table rentals. What a great group, hey? Way better than last year when Mark and Matt paid for a bar bill with petty cash and Connor mixed up the table order—way better. Maybe we better meet in two weeks—Tuesday night, let's say 7 to 9 p.m. to iron out all the details,” Johanna remarked.

“OK,” you agreed. “I'll book the room at Trout Lake Community Centre for that and let everyone know what's going on.”

**YOUR TASK** Write a post for the group's Facebook Group page. Select the appropriate information (and add any specific details you think are necessary). Make up your own group name. Update them on the funding and confirm event details and responsibilities. Remember to use document design features to make your post easy to read. Write a Twitter post announcing the event.

## ■ Social Networking Skills: Presentation Skills

### 5. Media Skills: Social Networking; Media Skills: Presentations L.O.2

Aritzia, a women's fashion retailer, has expanded from its original Vancouver location to stores across Canada and the United States. Aritzia is active in social media, using a variety of social media tools to let customers know about new products and provide information about fashion.

**YOUR TASK** With a team of classmates, study the company's website ([www.aritzia.com/](http://www.aritzia.com/)) and its social media presence (you can find various social media links on the website). Now identify a business near your college that could benefit from a similar social media strategy. Devise a social media strategy that could help this company expand its customer base and forge stronger links with the local community. Prepare a brief class presentation that describes the business and explains your proposed strategy. (Your instructor may ask you to undertake this as a service project, in which you meet with the company owner and present your proposed social media strategy.)

## ■ Social Networking Skills

### 6. Media Skills: Social Networking L.O.2

Social media can be a great way to, well, socialize during your college years, but employers are increasingly

checking up on the online activities of potential hires to avoid bringing in employees who may reflect poorly on the company.

**YOUR TASK** Team up with another student and review each other's public presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, blogs, and any other website that an employer might check during the interview and recruiting process. Identify any photos, videos, messages, or other material that could raise a red flag when an employer is evaluating a job candidate. Give each other feedback and suggestions. Write a reflection email about what you learned from the exercise and send the reflection to your instructor.

■ **Email Skills** ■ **Sustainability**

**7. Media Skills: Email L.O.3**

According to a report published by Statistics Canada, in 2008, the proportion of people who purchased or boycotted a product for ethical reasons rose to 27 percent of the population, compared to 20 percent in 2003.<sup>61</sup> Given this growing awareness about the environmental impact of our consumer behaviour, opportunities may exist for your company to make some changes that would broaden the appeal of your product to green consumers. You work for Caneast Foods, a chain of small grocery stores in Ontario. Currently produce is packaged on Styrofoam trays, something you would like to see replaced with a green product. You looked at some products available from Earthcycle Packaging ([www.earthcycle.com/sales.html](http://www.earthcycle.com/sales.html)) or Go-Green (<http://gogreenpackaging.com>) and think your company should consider making the switch to this type of packaging or something similar. As well, you have been looking at ways to use social media to connect with customers and develop customer relationships and loyalty. Your boss is not that familiar with use of social media, so the stores have not capitalized on how to use it to develop customer engagement.

**YOUR TASK** Write an email message to your boss suggesting that the company research the costs and benefits of switching from Styrofoam packaging to an alternative green product. Suggest two different social media channels the store might use to let consumers know about the change, and include a brief description of each media and how the store would benefit from using it.

■ **Email Skills** ■ **Sustainability** ■ **Social Networking Skills**

**8. Media Skills: Email L.O.2**

Assume you are a member of a local volunteer group of 15 people interested in nature conservancy. Your group is considering launching a campaign to educate people about an environmental issue affecting your area (select an issue that you care about). The leader of your group

has asked you to find some examples of how other conservation groups use social media to get their message out and to make some recommendations for your group's campaign.

**YOUR TASK** Use Google to find some examples of conservation groups that use social media to promote their cause. Write an email message to your director describing how social media are currently used by one of the groups you found and give your opinion of their effectiveness, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of your group using these media. Include your suggestions.

■ **Blogging Skills**

**9. Media Skills: Blogging L.O.5**

The Quebec Winter Carnival is one of the world's largest winter celebrations, with close to one million people participating in a wide variety of sports, cultural, and entertainment events in January and February each year. Some of its exciting events range from arctic spas to canoe, dog sled, and horse races to an international ice sculpture competition and Bonhomme's Ball.

**YOUR TASK** Assume that you write a pop culture blog and several of the readers of your blog have been asking for your recommendation about visiting the Quebec Winter Carnival next year. Write a two- or three-paragraph posting for your blog that explains what the Quebec Winter Carnival is and what visitors can expect to experience there. Be sure to address your posting to fans of your blog, not insiders who know all about the Carnival. You can learn more at [www.carnaval.qc.ca](http://www.carnaval.qc.ca).

■ **Blogging Skills**

**10. Media Skills: Blogging; Compositional Modes: Tutorials L.O.1, L.O.5**

Studying abroad for a semester or a year can be a rewarding experience in many ways—improving your language skills, experiencing another culture, making contacts in the international business arena, and building your self-confidence.

**YOUR TASK** Write a post for your class blog that describes your college's study-abroad program and summarizes the steps involved in applying for international study. If your school doesn't offer study-abroad opportunities, base your post on the program offered at another institution in your province.

■ **Microblogging Skills**

**11. Media Skills: Microblogging; Compositional Modes: Teasers L.O.1, L.O.5**

Twitter updates are a great way to alert people to helpful articles, videos, and other online resources.

**YOUR TASK** Find an online resource (it can be a website quiz, a YouTube video, a PowerPoint presentation, a newspaper article, or anything else appropriate) that offers some great tips to help college students prepare for job interviews. Write a teaser of no more than 120 characters that hints at the benefits other students can get from this resource. If your class is set up with private Twitter accounts, use your private account to send your message. Otherwise, email it to your instructor. Be sure to include the URL; if you're using a Twitter account, keep within the 140-character limit.

#### ■ Microblogging Skills

### 12. Media Skills: Microblogging L.O.5

Assume the boss took your suggestion in the scenario in Case #7. Instead of Styrofoam trays, your store will now be using trays made from palm fibres ([www.earth-cycle.com](http://www.earth-cycle.com)).

**YOUR TASK** Write a message to customers about your store's change to green packaging in the produce department. Adapt your message for posting via three different media: Twitter, Facebook, and the blog on the company's website.

#### ■ Podcasting Skills Portfolio Builder

### 13. Media Skills: Podcasting L.O.6

With any purchase decision, from a restaurant meal to a college education, recommendations from satisfied customers are often the strongest promotional messages.

**YOUR TASK** Write a script for a one- to two-minute podcast (roughly 150 to 250 words) explaining why your college or university is a good place to get an education. Your audience is high school students. You can choose to craft a general message, something that would be useful to all prospective students, or you can focus on a specific academic discipline, the athletic program, or some other important aspect of your college experience. Either way, make sure your introductory comments clarify whether you are offering a general recommendation or a specific recommendation. If your instructor asks you to do so, record the podcast and submit the file electronically.

#### ■ Podcasting Skills Portfolio Builder

### 14. Media Skills: Podcasting L.O.6

What product do you own (or use regularly) that you can't live without? It could be something as seemingly minor as a favourite pen or something as significant as a medical device that you literally can't live without. Now imagine that you're a salesperson for this product; think about how you would sell it to potential buyers. How would you describe it, and how would you explain the benefits of owning it? After you've thought about how you would present the product to others, imagine that you've been promoted to a sales manager position, and it is your job to train other people to sell the product.

**YOUR TASK** Write the script for a brief podcast (200 to 300 words) that summarizes for your sales staff the most important points to convey about the product. Imagine that they'll listen to your podcast while driving to a customer's location or preparing for the day's activity in a retail store (depending on the nature of the product). Be sure to give your staffers a concise overview message about the product and several key support points. If your instructor asks you to do so, record the podcast and submit the file electronically.

#### ■ Podcasting Skills Portfolio Builder

### 15. Media Skills: Podcasting L.O.6

While writing the many letters and electronic messages that are part of the job search process, you find yourself wishing that you could just talk to some of these companies so your personality could shine through. Well, you've just gotten that opportunity. One of the companies that you've applied to has emailed you back, asking you to submit a two-minute podcast introducing yourself and explaining why you would be a good person to hire.

**YOUR TASK** Identify a company that you'd like to work for after graduation and select a job that would be a good match for your skills and interests. Write a script for a two-minute podcast (about 250 words). Introduce yourself, name the position you're applying for, describe your background, and explain why you think you're a good candidate for the job. Make up any details you need. If your instructor asks you to do so, record the podcast and submit the file electronically.

## BUSINESS COMMUNICATION NOTEBOOK

# Ethics

## Spin Cycle: Deciphering Corporate Doublespeak

If there's one product North American businesses can manufacture in large amounts, it's doublespeak. Doublespeak is language that only pretends to say something but that in reality hides, evades, or misleads. Like most products, doublespeak comes in many forms, from the popular buzzwords that everyone uses but no one really understands—such as *competitive dynamics* and *empowerment*—to words that try to hide meaning, such as *re-engineering*, *misspeak*, and *restructuring*.

With doublespeak, bribes and kickbacks are called *rebates* or *fees for product testing*. With doublespeak, banks don't have *bad loans* or *bad debts*; they have *non-performing credits*. And corporations never lose money; they just experience *negative cash flow*, *deficit enhancement*, or *negative contributions to profits*.

Of course, no one gets fired these days. People high enough in the corporate pecking order *resign for personal reasons*. Those in lower ranks leave as the result of *downsizing*, *workforce adjustments*, and *headcount reductions*. One automobile company that closed an entire assembly plant and eliminated more than 8000 jobs called the action *a volume-related production schedule adjustment*.

The goal of good writing is to communicate, not to confuse; to be understood, not to hide behind words. Look at this confusing excerpt from an investment document:

The applicability of the general information and administrative procedures set forth below accordingly will vary depending on the investor and the record-keeping system established for a shareholder's investment in the Fund. Participants in RRSPs and other plans should first consult with the appropriate persons at their employer or refer to the plan materials before following any of the procedures below.

As discussed in Chapter 4, *plain English* is a way of writing and arranging technical materials so that your audience can understand your meaning. Restating our excerpt in plain English reveals one simple thought: "If you are investing through a large retirement plan or other special program, follow the instructions in your program material."

Some companies are concerned that writing documents in plain English will increase their liability, but many companies are finding just the opposite. Documents that are clear and less ambiguous can help reduce liability.

Some lawyers may purposely choose obscure language to profit from people who must then hire them to interpret the difficult language. But many legal professionals strongly endorse the plain-English movement, and as it gains momentum, perhaps confusing language will become obsolete.

## Applications for Success

For more on the subject of doublespeak, visit [www.dt.org/html/Doublespeak.html](http://www.dt.org/html/Doublespeak.html) to read William Lutz's article "Life Under the Chief Doublespeak Officer."

Answer the following questions:

1. Isn't corporate doublespeak just another way to emphasize the positive in business situations? Or is it unethical to use business buzzwords and corporate doublespeak to ease negative impressions? Explain your position in an email message to your instructor.
2. The president of one company just learned that some of his employees have been playing a popular game called "buzzword bingo," in which participants ridicule doublespeak by tracking the jargon their bosses use during staff meetings on bingo-like cards. What can managers do to avoid these silly games?
3. Visit the following buzzword bingo website and print out a card or two to identify some typical buzzwords: <http://lurkertech.com/buzzword-bingo/>.